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# THRESHOLDS

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## NUMBER 8: DEC 8

Urban centers across the world are in a traumatized state due to either the explosive effects of war or the more subtle processes of economic, political and physical erosion. This issue of *Thresholds* considers the role of architecture under these conditions. Yahya explores strategies

### Sequestered Entities, The Logic of Identity<sup>1</sup>

by Maha Yahya

„In war the damage inflicted on bodies is unalterable, whereas the symbolic claims or issues change with great ease.“ - Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*

[The nation] „is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.“ - Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*

During fifteen years of civil war in Lebanon, the 'logic of identity' to quote Iris Marion Young, was firmly entrenched in separatist policies constructed by the militias.<sup>2</sup> Political actors, she argues, who often conceive of group difference as 'otherness' consequently form policies informed by one of two strategies, separation or assimilation. The choice of strategy reveals a singular concept of identity that either subordinates difference to a hegemonic normative ideal, or constructs difference as a pathological deviation. During periods of conflict between the various actors, especially violent disputes, group difference is premised upon a separatist construction of 'otherness' which reduces groups through simplistic dichotomies to a common set of attributes against which one's identity is juxtaposed. Difference becomes a 'negative referent.'

Between 1975 - 1991, contending forces laid claim to different segments of Beirut in a bid to delineate, influence, and control interaction between various communities. Social exclusion was instrumental to such control, deeply implicating geographical space. Grounded in territorial fragmentation, symbolized by the geographic dislocation of various communities during war, collective modes of identification, such as ethnicity, nationhood, and community, are opened to reinterpretation. Communal and religious identities became embedded within politically defined and geographically bound sites. The militias needed to create homogeneous entities so as to assume control over territory. A reorganization of Beirut's urban landscape, the use of its spaces, access into and through various territories etc, ensued. Two principal territorial procedures were followed by the militias to establish their own socio-geographic base in the city. On the one hand, they forged a series of barriers both visible and invisible throughout the city which overturned all spatial hierarchy and atomized state authority. On the other hand, 450,000 individuals were violently expelled from various sectors of the city.

These sustained onslaughts took place in various regions where particular segments of the population were viewed as politically or religiously different. The urban landscape of Beirut was reconstructed into a series of distinct zones, characterized by the political affiliations of religiously heterogeneous inhabitants. Particular fragments of territory became representative of different

groups of citizens, as various physical structures gave visible articulation to new identities. Identified with a geographic site, power in this instance was refixed. In other words, the 'purification' of various territories was used ideologically by the militias to assert their control by conjoining their own identities with fragments of a religiously and politically elutinated landscape.

The concept of an 'other' both entirely knowable and visible through a specific system of representation was created. Lacking physical and visible criteria by which to define difference, one's name, one's identity card, one's religion, one's place of habitat, metamorphosed as the 'negative referents.' These very characteristics that define the self were objectified, converted into instruments of absolute power and elements of self betrayal, even death. Once initiated, these practices came to resemble the treatment of lunatics in 19th century Britain where "the many mainstream fears and prejudices regarding certain 'outsider' groups often led into concrete social practices through which distinctions between these 'mainstream' and 'outsider' peoples are reproduced and even rendered more acute and which... commonly boast a spatial dimension, as when society seeks to exclude their 'outsiders' from normal places of living and working."<sup>3</sup> Through their systems of exclusion and inclusion, the militias annotated a specific conception of the normal and the pathological, prescribing the acceptance of certain social groups. More importantly, population compliance and conformity guaranteed the reproduction of these norms and, by extension, the militias.

Spatially the re-definition and reconstruction of groups' identities as an alien 'other' was reinforced by the disqualification of traditional public spaces such as the historic city center. In the pre-war era the center acted as the major public space and meeting point of all communities and classes. As the space where difference was possible, it contradicted the objective of warring factions to create religiously homogeneous territories which they could control. It was rapidly converted into a contested battlefield between rival factions and altered into a desolate stretch of no man's land along the city in two.

With the termination of the fifteen year old civil war, and the dissolution of the militias, a new set of power relations prevail in Beirut. However, the architecture of the war and the modes by which people came to inhabit spaces continue to linger, as a testament to the devastation. Destroyed buildings occupied by displaced populations and posters of martyrs of various militias persist as the most potent affirmation to the reality of the war. Within this fractured

(continued on page 5)

of assimilation and separation in the reconstruction of Beirut after decades of civil war. Williamson considers the recent trend towards "outreach" studios, such as that conducted last spring with San Juan as the site; student work from this studio is also presented. Whang contemplates notions of the "residual" within today's urban context and the modernist rhetoric of "cleansing the city." The architect as activist is presented in the figure of Amir Pasic, a preservationist from Bosnia-Herzegovina who is already planning reconstruction even as the destruction continues. And finally, in our new expanded Letters section, the Roy Stickleland Boulevard/Manhattan debate continues

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cover photo by C. Lindwe Erroungu

## STUDENT WORK RIO PIEDRAS STUDIO



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# OLD S

1993

clockwise: map of Mostar Stan-Grad; present states of building fabric; Old Bridge of Mostar by Hajrudin, 1566



## RESISTING CULTURAL ERASURE: AMIR PASIC'S MOSTAR 2004

Documenting the physical and cultural destruction of the city of Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina, these photographs are from the collection of Amir Pasic, presently a visiting scholar at the Aga Khan program of the Department of Architecture and an architect from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Involved for many years in the restoration of numerous monuments in the Stan-Grad (ancient city) of Mostar, as Director of the Institute for Urban Planning and Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Mostar, Pasic's work was awarded the Aga Khan prize for historic restoration in 1986. The historic area is now entirely in ruins, its mosques, churches, schools, symphony orchestra building, hotels, cafés, shops and housing having all been systematically bombed. The famous 100 foot single-arched stone bridge built by the Turkish engineer Hajrudin in 1566 survived until November 9, when it, the last remaining city bridge, was finally destroyed.

At the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art, and Culture in Istanbul, Pasic has been actively planning for "Mostar

2004," an optimistic and ambitious program to reconstruct the major cultural monuments of the city (Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic) as a testament to the potential for achieving and maintaining a multi-cultural society. The inauguration date for the reconstruction is set for 15 September, 2004 at 5 PM.

In Pasic's view, the war is not about Serb versus Croat versus Muslim antagonisms, essentially it is anti-urban warfare whose focus of attack is the cities where a multi-cultural society has thrived and where its institutions are located. The method of warfare is the targeted annihilation of the cultural artifacts and icons (churches, mosques, libraries, records offices) that attest to the past and possible future existence of this society - a "cleansing" that is cultural as well as ethnic.

Pasic has gathered an archive of photographs documenting the destruction of Mostar. Many of the images are snapshots, as it is still too soon for "professional" documentation of the destruction. An exhibition of these images has been on view in

Istanbul, Karachi, Rome, Madrid, the European Parliament in Strasbourg, and most recently at Harvard. By exhibiting these images, Pasic hopes to mobilize funds for reconstruction, however, his intention is not to facilitate a mere resurrection of the past. As was written in the 30 July 1993 issue of *New Statesman*, "his vision is of a utopian city of the 21st century that can be a prototype for the reconstruction of the whole of Bosnia."

The plans for "Mostar 2004" include the formation of an innovative interdisciplinary architectural school in which students will participate in the reconstruction of selected monuments and the establishment of guidelines for the reconstruction and rebuilding of historic areas as a "hands-on laboratory" for their education. ■

Anyone interested in finding out more about this project should contact Dr. Pasic through the Aga Khan Program.

Throughout our project are important touchstones that give the area an overall image which can be taken as memories or notions of a place, much the same way that Old San Juan can conjure up images and memories of the past, present and the future.

- Robert Rerless/ Masaaki Yonesu



### Making a Garden City

Our design originates in human experience and is based upon human perception. The gardens and landscaping along the streets are designed to render an illusion of a suburban environment, not to imitate nature, but to encourage people to move back to the city.

- Ming Yuen/ Meng Howe Lim



## PAGE THREE

# THE STUDIO DILEMMA : Approaching Distant Sites

by June Williamson

The author of the following article participated in Jan Wampler's Spring 1993 Level III studio which considered a site in Puerto Rico. A similar studio is to be offered next spring. The studio publication *Proyecto de Rio Piedras* available on reserve in Rotch Library

What is the most effective means of addressing the social role of architecture in the design studio? This is a persistent question in the Department. An hermetic attitude currently prevalent in many design schools leads to an emphasis on formalism that is often deliberately distanced from "real" situations, and heavily laden with theory. On the other hand, attempts at formulating design studios as architectural outreach programs are susceptible to becoming embroiled in local political issues that might supersede the design issues and preclude solutions and design resolution. Some might say that school is the last opportunity to experiment in ways that the marketplace can sustain - be it public or private. Others might say that without exposure to economic, political, and cultural constraints, the education of the architect is inadequate. This issue is particularly salient now as recent studios and workshops have chosen to go not only outside of the Institute but outside of the region to such distant destinations as Jamaica, Mexico, Pakistan, Dallas, and Berkeley.

Any attempt to present a studio program outside the Institute's walls must negotiate between these extremes. My experience in the Rio Piedras studio was interesting in this regard. There is no question these projects require time - an extreme amount of time - on the part of both instructor and student. The range of issues requiring attention is immense, as in any "real" project. One of the advantages of a studio problem is the opportunity to devise specific limitations and controls, but when students are "let loose" into an existing community, complexities abound.

Rio Piedras is an island area of the city of San Juan that, much like Brooklyn in New York, was once a separate city. It contains a medium-sized park, a main church and plaza, and a central shopping street with numerous discount shops and a huge produce market. Rio Piedras also contains large crowded squatter areas in addition to older

neighborhoods where a barricade mentality is realized by gates, fences and iron gratings over porches, windows and doors. The central district, once quite fashionable, is now constricted and separated from surrounding residential neighborhoods by main roads and highways built with large subsidies from the United States.

The Rio Piedras studio consisted of an initial week long visit to San Juan. We were sponsored by the municipal government, whose interest in the project was fueled by confusion and conflict stemming from the transfer in last year's elections of gubernatorial power to the oppositional conservative party. The sponsorship consisted of financial support in exchange for a final presentation and report. During that week we met with city planning officials, who presented us with historical information and informed us about proposals to construct a mass transit system on the island.

The political conflict surrounding the issue of mass transit is a classic case of urban/suburban tension, fueled by fears of rising crime. The governor's proposal involves high speed trains linking the growing outer suburbs to downtown commercial areas, bypassing low income ("crime ridden") neighborhoods. The municipal proposal is to provide an alternative mode of transport around the large city to ease traffic congestion, and to serve those without automobiles. However, those without automobiles are the very people the suburbanians, who are increasingly organizing themselves into closed neighborhoods (called urbanizations), are seeking to avoid.

With this background political information, we then conducted site studies in Rio Piedras, gathering information on such topics as the urban fabric, transportation, historic buildings, vernacular typology, edges and boundaries, etc. We were asked to consider the future of this entire area (present population of 8,800) while maintaining the viewpoint of architects, rather than employing the strategies of planners. We were explicitly encouraged to be "visionary" in our approach. The stated process was as follows:

The design process began with each student projecting a vision of what Rio Piedras should be like in 25 years. Students were then asked to produce a plan concerning mass transit, connections to the University, connections to other points of Rio Piedras, commercial areas, housing, transportation and ideas about the plaza. Drawings and models were built to illustrate the first concept.

Students then formed teams to work on these proposals. A new proposal was made, combining the different ideas and incorporating suggestions and criticism.

Then detailed architectural models were developed in order to understand not only Rio Piedras from an urban design point of view but also from an architectural point of view. The intention was to illustrate ideas through architectural proposals that could be clearly understood.

An examination of this statement reveals utopian thinking, combined with a concern for legibility. Our visions were broad and sweeping, and not at all ruminative. Teamwork was introduced to combat the sheer volume of issues involved, although some students continued to work alone. Legibility was of importance as we expected our work to communicate directly to an audience beyond the architecturally initiated. At the same time, I, for one, wished to avoid mere illustration in my work, and was wary of the creeping professionalism of such "marketing" strategies. While presentation skills are crucial to success in professional practice, the integrity of an academic program of architecture depends on an emphasis on content.

An important component of the work was the production of a series of final recommendations. Each was agreed upon by a majority of the group, even though many of our overall schemes were contradictory to one another. These recommendations presented some proposals that could be immediately acted upon independently of others (such as the establishment of an historic district and the adaptation of new zoning regulations to allow mixed use). Other recommendations were part of a linked set of strategies that would require extensive planning and resources to carry out (such as a combination high speed/light rail transportation system coordinated with buses, parking, and public vans and the introduction of university facilities into the urban fabric). These recommendations culled the best aspects of our individual proposals and challenged the notion that each individual proposal represented a total solution.

At the end of the semester, we returned to San Juan to make a final presentation of our work, augmented with slides and speeches. The event was attended by planners, architects and others from the city government, rather than the general public. We were also afforded a meeting with Mayor Hector L. Acevedo who put each one of us on the spot by asking what we thought must be done in areas like Rio Piedras. The work of the studio was then collected into a bilingual publication

that was presented to the city of San Juan and also serves as evidence to the collective nature of our work.

It remains to be seen whether or not we will have an impact on the future of Rio Piedras. Our status as outsiders renders our conclusions suspect in the political process through which decisions must be made in democratic societies. But, as Jan Wampler wrote in the book's conclusion "We must, in Rio Piedras, make no small plans. We must make bold plans. We do not have time, we do not have 25 years, whatever we do, we cannot do it without understanding and developing strong relationships with the people. The people of Rio Piedras are its strength and resource. Any plan must relate to them."

In our cynical times, these idealistic words may be hard to swallow, but in many senses they ring true. I hope that other studios in the future strive to provide students with the exposure and encouragement to approach problems in architecture beyond the realm of formalism. But I caution against asking students to perform as professional consultants with all of the weighty responsibilities such a role entails. The work should not be judged solely on a scale of "realizability" or cultural "appropriateness," but also in terms of inventiveness, depth of inquiry, and willingness to challenge conventions, expectations, and economic determinism. ■

'Proyecto de Rio Piedras: Making Unruly Cities', (Cambridge, MIT Department of Architecture, 1993), p. 22

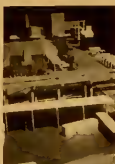


top to bottom: shopping street in Rio Piedras, main church and plaza

## A System of Linear Parkways

The scheme is based on the contention that it is not necessary to increase overall density to improve the urban environment. What is crucial is the qualitative shaping of open space to contribute to the well-being of the vibrant urban community already existing in Rio Piedras, rather than seeking to attract a whole new set of residents and users.

- June Williamson

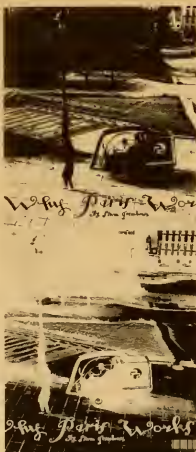


## Communities Formed by Culture

To the Puerto Rican culture the plaza is a symbol of identity, a reminder of towns and villages from which urban energy originates. In this study I propose that city form should be based on the ways people live and the ways people use spaces such as the plaza.

- Lawrence Sasso

# RESIDUALISMS : Urban Health Care Policies by Sarah Whiting



Reading Thresholds #6 I was struck by the neo-rm connect by Carson and Emoung in their article, "Residual Modernisms?" In this age of post-post-modernity, post-techno-modernism, post-post-neo-neo, what does it mean to posit a residual modernism within today's urban context, or, perhaps more accurately what does it mean to posit today's urban context as a residual modernism?

In an uncanny (or perhaps merely fortuitous) way, residual, from the Latin residuum, immediately follows residential in Webster's listings, thereby opening the door to an architectural or urban parallelism. Surprisingly elaborate, the term's definition posits multiple paths for this parallelism

## RESIDUAL

1. of, relating to, or constituting a residue
2. leaving a residue that remains effective for some time
- 3a the difference between results obtained by observation and by computation from a formula or between the mean of several observations and any one of them
- 3b a residual product, film, or substance
- 3c an internal aftereffect of experience or activity that influences later behavior esp. a disability remaining from a disease or operation
- 4 a payment (as to an actor) for each return after an initial showing (as of a taped TV show)

The residual, then, is that part of empirical evidence which doesn't quite fit into the equation the other which sits

outside the compartmentalization resulting from the operation, but which also hovers somewhat aside in that it remains a threat to the equation. If focus is turned upon that which doesn't fit, if it becomes more important than that which does fall into the given pattern, then the entire structure of the equation can be thrown into question. The residue is that dirt which can be swept out the door, but which can't be swept away. It remains hovering by the threshold, within the pages of *Thresholds*. But what about the return payment then, who gets the payoff on the repeated urban residual?

The urban residual is indeed a question of returns. Even without being conditioned by the happy coincidence of "residual" proximity to "residential" in the dictionary's listings, it is hard not to be struck by the echoes of twentieth century urban narratives within Webster's definitions. For isn't the residual really that which was rejected for not fitting within modernism's grand narrative, that which was papered over within postmodernism's grand narrative, that which was aestheticized within deconstructivism's grand narrative, and that which is falsely thought to have disappeared within the clean networks of the contemporary cybernetic grand narrative? The residual is that which is other. The urban residual is the messy in the literal sense of dust, dirt, garbage, and graffiti; as well as in the more metaphorical sense of those members of the population who are given a role, but not a place in the functioning of the city. Those populations who don't quite fit into the urban equation.

An extreme example of such "residual" individuals are the construction workers who built Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer's Brasília as early as 1967, just seven years after the inauguration of this paradigmatic modernist city, over ten percent of Brasília's population was living in temporary, spontaneous settlements or shanty towns.<sup>1</sup> Social workers describing this unplanned population of Brasília refer to both their economic and locational "marginality." Like the margins of a text, these people have settled on the periphery of the city, redefining the precisely drawn edges of Lúcio Costa's Pilot Plan. But it is the grand boulevards of Brasília which still today appear in "official" photographs (the state documents, tourist brochures, and architectural anthologies) of the city; the residual population hovers invisibly in the margins of these often aesthetically dramatic, "purified" images.

The cleansing of the city — and of the image of the city — has undergone several transformations since modernism.<sup>2</sup> But at the end of the day, like the dust bunny that never really disappears from underneath the bed, it remains at the top of the urban agenda. In 1987, at the *Première Journée Professionnelle de la Propriété Urbaine* conference in Paris, one organizer articulated — in a wistful prose — the desire of all municipal authorities when he asked, "couldn't we dream to construct a city starting from the very premise of its cleanliness?"<sup>3</sup> The acoustical similarity of the French "propre" and "propre" is maintained in their English translations "proper" and "property." Property is intertwined with propriety. The residual is that which is neither owned, nor considered to reside within the norms of cleanliness.

The dilemma for such urbanists as the French municipal authority quoted above, however, is that while private space is maintained with care — the dust bunnies ritualistically rounded up and then set out to pasture on the curb with the rest of the week's garbage — public space has become harder and harder to keep clean. Particularly during periods of recession cutbacks, garbage piles up along the curbs and stinks up the sidewalks. Municipal authorities who dream of cleanliness can no longer afford the cost of controlling their cities.

In Paris, the solution has been to continually increase the budget for municipal services. Ten percent of the city's operating

budget is spent on cleanliness, of the city's 38,000 employees, 4,500 of them are sweepers who hand sweep the city's 800 miles of streets daily.<sup>4</sup> Many are forced to live in the less costly suburbs, those who do stay within the city mainly live in the *Goutte d'Or*, a neighborhood which, ironically enough, does not get the same level of cleansing as the boulevards of the wealthy, central arrondissements. The green suited men may be responsible for the actual sweeping, but they aren't the ones who control the sweeping agenda.

In the U.S., an increasingly common solution to this sanitation dilemma has been the privatization of the city: in Seaside, Florida, modernism's zoning strategies have been taken to a postmodern extreme, resulting in a neo-Victorian/neo-Georgian theater of exclusivity (the residual, or the payment for too many returns of *Lives of the Rich and Famous*?). To quote the planners, Andreas Duaney and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, "We only code the private buildings in Seaside and in our other towns. We want to achieve a certain harmony in the private fabric, a certain silence in order to define the streets and squares."<sup>5</sup> Whose harmony? Who's silenced? Who sweeps the streets of Seaside? Brasília's residual problem has been dressed in new clothes, but it remains hovering at the threshold nonetheless. Styles may have changed since modernism first initiated a rhetoric of hygiene in the 20s, but the desire to eliminate the residual has been (sell the residual of that rhetoric, the "internal after effect of experience or activity that influences later behavior," to go back to Webster's

Throughout the century, there has been a false notion that the residual is a singularity and that it can or should be eliminated. Theism of the residual, however, is a dual one: it is both a problem to be addressed and a potential, or given, to be explored. A solution must be sought for that residual which is the collapsing infrastructure of our cities, but the realistic solution cannot be to simply increase the size of the silenced class of cleansers. Why air the returns of Brasília by literally "drawing out" the residual population so that the harmonies of the proprietors can be heard? The needs of the residual population should be "drawn in" the town planners' definition of the streets and squares.<sup>6</sup> That is not to suggest that a space for the residual should be designed alongside a space for the dominant, but, rather, that the spaces of the residual should cross the threshold back into the space of the city, rather than being constantly swept out of it. ■

<sup>1</sup> David G. Epstein, *Brasília: Plan and Reality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Brazilian social workers' seminar proceedings as quoted by Epstein, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the original — certainly the most emphatic — articulation of this modernist desire is Le Corbusier's chapter "A Cost of Whiteness" in his 1925 text, *The Decoration of Art Today*. In this chapter Le Corbusier imagines, much like the organizer of the 1987 Parisian Propriété Conference, the passing of a law requiring whiteness: "Imagine the results of the Law of Ropine. Every citizen is required to replace his hangings, his damasks, his wall-papers his stencils with a plain coat of white ropine. His home is made clean. There are no more dirty, dark corners. Everything is show as it is. Then comes inner cleanliness, for the course adopted leads to refusal to allow anything at all which is not correct, authorized, intended, desired, thought-out, no action before thought!" Le Corbusier, *Decorative Art Today*, 1925. trans. James Dunnet (Cambridge: MIT Press 1987), p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted by Maïté Cuvelin in "La Propriété au Risque de l'Exclusion," *Les Années de la Recherche Urbaine*, n. 53, December 1991, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Greenhouse, Stephen, "Why Paris Works," *The New York Times Magazine* (July 10, 1992), pp. 18-49.

<sup>6</sup> Andreas Duaney, "Coding America," *ANY* 1, (July/August, 1993), p. 15.





## A Public Framework Strategy

The area of Rio Piedras needs a diverse layering of uses and activities to make it a whole city and community. This layering is necessary to make Rio Piedras a genuine place of exchange, of both goods and ideas. An important element of this scheme is the proposed rail transit system.

- Gregory Tosh/ Shaun Roth



## SEQUESTERED ENTITIES (continued from p.1)

city, the state, like the militias, attempts to carve out a geographic territory for itself. Marginalized and rendered mute for fifteen years of war, both state and the city center reemerge as the new sites of contestation. While ex-milita heads and a body of private entrepreneurs serve as ministers and parliamentaries, moving their bitter rivalries into the realm of the state, the city center - the epitome of prewar communal coexistence and emblem of national unity - emerges as the primary target by the state and private developers for a massive reconstruction effort. The center is 'recovered' from the vagaries of war, as the locus upon which the state could practice its territorial imperatives by appropriating and then abstracting a symbolically laden space. State power is seen to radiate from a now exclusive center, achievable both through a distinct economic configuration for reconstruction and the implementation of a ubiquitous master plan. Embedded within this move and characterized by the proposal presented for the reconstruction of the city center, is the elimination of war-induced territorial practices initiated by the militias. The 'logic of identity' practiced by the state in reconstruction speaks of both separation and assimilation. While government and administrative appointments continue to be defined by religious affiliations, the state purports a hegemonic identity for its various communities as its *modus operandi*. However, in its zeal to re-establish itself as the legal purveyor of law and order, the state unwittingly continues to define difference as a negative otherness. The nature of the similarities, the ruptures, the discontinuities of the communal identities of a plural society within the history and the spatial structure of Beirut, are overlooked. Heterogeneity, once negatively acculturated by the militias, is now repressed by the state. In its reconstruction plans for the city center, both the framework and the architectural iconography highlight this strategy.<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, a private Real Estate company (REC) to be jointly owned by local property owners and investors was set up as the framework within which reconstruction of the center would take place. It set the precedent for a new type of property ownership as well as a new form of public-private participation. All property boundaries were eradicated, the entire area transformed into one homogeneous lot owned by the company. Fifty percent of the shares would be distributed amongst current property owners, whilst the remaining fifty percent would be owned by financial investors. An abstract space is produced in the absence created by the dissolution of actual social space signified by diverse forms of tenure relationships. By negating and redefining topography and by making territory an abstraction, the ties that bind the various forms of urban reality to its proposed spatial structures are loosened. The use value of this space becomes primarily political: its symbolism as a space of reunification exploited.

The struggle over the control of this strategic space is an endeavor to control spatial organization and authority over the use of space, a crucial means for the reproduction and generation of social power relations. Its power in Beirut has in its declared objective of reunification which, by its very nature, means subordination. Development is understood as a massive physical investment rather than a process which needs to accommodate various claims. Through the forced homogenization of property, social interactions are sanitized. The existence of various forms of commercial enterprises and social associations, which cut across both religious and class boundaries in the pre-war center, were possible due to the variety of different tenure relationships, hence the social process inherent within property. Banks could exist alongside souks which catered to both the rich and poor. The third policy, where communities identified each other through relational and experiential categories rather than totalizing classifications and substantial loyalties, is eradicated. The REC transmutates the social aspects of property first into a binary relationship between investors and owners and property owners and secondly into that of larger or smaller shareholders. The possibilities for the consolidation of different identities inherent within the reconfiguration of property by the REC, remain unexamined.

These themes are echoed in the master plan itself. The

center is envisaged with no apparent links in its planning to the rest of the city or country. In the architectural drawings, Beirut is erased, the center presented as an exclusive entity floating in a non-existent city. A perspectival tradition dominates the planning process, with the organization of facades to be looked at and vantage points to see from. The streets are wide and clearly visible, terminated by high towers from which one can have a totalizing view of the whole city. Chaotic, picturesque aspects of the center, such as its medieval souks, are replaced by clearer, more regular buildings of seemingly similar caliber. Moreover, the language and iconography utilized in the project render memory into a topos of contestation and appropriation, another instrument for the construction of an assimilated group identity. Descriptions of various parts of the project recall the 'modern' capitals of Europe and America. Paris is evoked through the 'Champs Elysees' of Beirut, which cuts through the existing Bouja square, whereas Washington is recalled through the Serail complex transmutated into the Capitol Hill of Beirut and New York is brought to life as a mini Manhattan in the artificial island reclaimed from the sea. Such language used in describing the project, seems to be subscribing to the collective memory of Lebanese emigrants to entice them back. Yet in stark contradiction, the iconographic images utilized hark back to different motifs in the traditional Lebanese houses, especially its tiled roofs and arcades. The medieval souks of the city are destroyed in the name of promoting this 'modern' image and then recreated in the name of preserving the flavor of the traditional Lebanese Bazaar, as if appealing to the memory of the Beirutis who knew the center for what it was in the prewar era.

In the process a more important question is submerged: in whose image is the center being created, as the memories of generations who have known nothing but war and destruction is not even interrogated. The shared experience of the immediate present, even if a war torn present, is excluded from the center also the rest of the city. Such a singular appropriation of memory and selective plundering of the iconography of the past, is an attempt by the state to create the modern space of the 'imagined community' or the national identity of the Lebanese. The spatialization of identity politics and inter-religious relations are now dependent upon sameness, both socially (in terms of class) and architecturally. The spaces envisaged by the plan cater primarily to the upper income with their banks and boutiques. By persistently claiming that his plan was recreating the 'old center in a better' and more modern manner, the architect refused to acknowledge that such spatial 'gentrification' both architecturally and within the institution of property, repudiates the return of a large portion of the community. This attempt to transplant particular imagery to both recreate and articulate a position of centrality for the state, simply yields another artifact devoid of any power to consolidate a nation after years of internal and external strife. It is a process which falls into its own trap of self-referentiality, for it cannot escape from its own contradictions. In trying to create an image for the state and a locus of power, difference is eradicated under the guise of unification, while the shared experience of the various communities - which could begin to characterize a third policy of inter-relational group identities - are abandoned. The conflicts over the meaning of Lebanese nationality which have plagued the country since inception are not questioned, while persisting attempts by all the religious communities in Lebanon to fabricate a politically distinct and almost sovereign 'imagined community' of their own are abjured.

Difference is therefore suppressed; details are forgotten in the actual renderings of the project. A coherent image of a future based on an economic rejuvenation - a regaining of the position of Beirut as the 'Switzerland of the Middle East' - is presented. This new national identity, it seems, is to be based upon economic foundations which cut across religious divisions and are thus the unifying force of the Lebanese 'political community'. Beirut is to become the 'Hong Kong' of the Middle East. Such allusions ignore the current status of 'Hong Kong' as a colony and its uncertain political future. Moreover, the architect omits the more immediate past, the more recent history of the country as he reaches out to a more idyllic and revered time, the eternal past just waiting to be

rediscovered, the designated 'golden age' of Beirut.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, time is treated in a linear fashion, as if this so called cohesive Lebanese community simply moved, as an entity, up or down history. The simultaneity of modern temporal experience, and its particularities during the war in Lebanon, are simply erased. The center is to be modernized, whilst regarding its function as the meeting point of all Lebanese communities, a reflection of the Lebanese nation, through its economic imperative as the link between East and West.

The function of the master plan for the city center in redefining architecture's social and political roles is of critical importance especially in its declared mission both to articulate a national identity as well as to reconstruct and rejuvenate the country. Despite the attempt to present the center as a homogeneous and unified entity, through its very abstraction this space also contains a plethora of signs and symbols that cannot be subsumed beneath the seemingly rational actions taken in its formation. The pseudo-historical nostalgia which mandates the project, along with its polemistic rather than democratic overtones, its fabricated traditions and pandering to a specific set of clientele, all point to the abandonment of any social vision for the country. In the quest for an illusory image of power, the spatial or temporal 'tactics' of citizens reflected in their disparate forms of appropriating and alienating the architecture of war, spatially and socially, are eliminated. The permeability of boundaries, visibly present in the everyday tactics which turn a destroyed sports stadium into a shelter, the interior room of a house into a courtyard, the continuous movement of populations through the different zones, despite and in spite of the militias, remain unexplored. Through its hegemonic planning deals, the project negated the multiple possibilities inherent within various forms of social experiences and which are implicit in the spatial articulation of different identities. Rather than attempting an architecture of 'pluralistic communitarianism', the master plan actually promotes divisions and exclusions.<sup>3</sup>

Different buildings do not attempt to empower radically diverse groups nor to articulate particular and intercommunal identities, while public spaces do not allow multiple narratives. In Hannah Arendt's sense, to unfold. They actually promote one cohesive monolithic identity - that of capital and private enterprise. The meaning of public, both in a social and spatial sense in this instance, is narrowly tied to the political, its moral, religious, aesthetic, etc. significance are subverted as the architecture used aspires to nothing more than the articulation of functions and the pigeonholing of the users associated with these functions.

The question here, however, is not whether the culture of the nation, as depicted in the project may be re-articulated for democratic ends. It is whether the prevailing attempts at historicizing and locating memory may be disconnected from its present forms of symbolism to articulate different forms of cultural and historical identity which allow for that third policy. ■

<sup>1</sup> To Florence Eid - Who puts the 'm' back in... memory?

My thanks to Rosalind Deutsche and Edward Eggen for valuable comments. ■ Les Maiton Young Justice and the Politics of Difference. Princeton University Press, 1990. p. 96-121.

<sup>2</sup> C. Philo, 'Enough to drive one mad: the organization of space in the 19th-century Islamic asylum', *The Power of Geography*, J. Welch (Ed.) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 285-330.

<sup>3</sup> In current revisions a physical plan is less monolithic and more connected to the rest of the city. However, mediating structures which assume a transformation in social relations by focussing on associational life, have not yet materialized.

<sup>4</sup> See Walter Benjamin 'Theses on the philosophy of History' *Illuminations*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Roberto Mangabera Unger, *The Better Futures of Architecture* Lecture at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, Fall 1992.

5

# LETTERS:

## To the editors:

I read with interest the review of the Frederick Douglass Boulevard Project in *Thresholds* 6.

Although your writers Juli Carson and C. Lindwe Emoungu purport to review the two catalogues that have accompanied the project, an examination of the documents reveals that your writers instead misrepresent and manipulate the material.

To recap the Carson/Emoungu piece, the Frederick Douglass Boulevard Project is based on "high Modernist" references whose use is "uncritical" and then "imposed" on "residual" residents. These people, members of "an underprivileged yet unified community" are never represented in the project's design, although represented are "spit-shinned toddlers from 1950s (?) suburbia" litmus test for success of modernist housing/schooling projects. In the juxtaposition of selected images from the catalogues, the photograph of these youngsters (white) is positioned by Carson/Emoungu between photographs of Harlem residents (black) and a rendering of a new building for Frederick Douglass Boulevard to expose a racial agenda for the project.

Quite a set of accusations! And ones ominously introduced by the editors of *Thresholds* as "a warning against the resurrection of modernist rhetoric as a means towards contemporary urban problem solving."

For the plaintiffs are contradicted by the evidence.

"Uncritical use of high Modernist references?" Carson/Emoungu overlook p 14 of *Boulevard/Manhattan*, where three building types are identified as precedents for the new housing: The New York row house, apartment house, and left building - hardly "high Modernist." They also overlook p.7, where the project is described as creating "a new avenue for New York." The superblook, architectural Modernism's fundamental tool in restructuring the city, is nowhere in sight. Conflating the building's plans on the project's overall scheme reveals that architectural and planning precedents are far broader and more inclusive than Carson/Emoungu allow.

"Modernist paradigms imposed on Harlem?" Please see p 6 of *School and Boulevard*, where the project is introduced as representative of efforts by "locally-based development groups to renew neighborhoods." These groups initiated the project. (And helped design and document it - the project's urban designers and the site's photographer are long-term Harlem residents.)

"Residual" residents? A harsh characterization, indeed - but Carson/Emoungu's, not mine. The catalogues list "unrelated single individuals, intergenerational [families] familiar to Harlem" people employed at home, students, those needing transitional housing, the elderly as the population for whom the project is designed. In *Boulevard/Manhattan*, the adjective "residual" is applied to places, not people.

"Spit-shinned toddlers from 1950s (?) suburbia - a curious inclusion?" Not in the context of *School and Boulevard*, the catalogue whose second project, the Clinton School, is ignored by Carson/Emoungu. In *Boulevard/Manhattan*, which catalogues the Frederick Douglass Boulevard Project exclusively, this image does not appear (and therefore should not be used to imply a racial agenda for the project).

"Why are [Harlem children] not pictured?" They are - please see p 6 fig. 1 of *School and Boulevard*. This photograph is also found on p 5 of *Boulevard/Manhattan*. In it children can be seen walking on Frederick Douglass Boulevard.

"Where are the people described as community?" Not in the rendering selected for showing by Carson/Emoungu, but clearly shown in the drawing on p 19 in *Boulevard/Manhattan*, and visible in drawings shown on p 7 of *School and Boulevard* (And reprinted in *Thresholds* 5). These are people of color - teenagers walking on the street, an elderly man crossing the boulevard, a woman exiting a corner store, a man and barber visible through the plate glass window of a shop, a cluster of young women and men in front of a community room, a man pruning his hedge on his balcony, and - especially ironic in light of Carson/Emoungu's complaint about the catalogues' lack of representation of Harlem children - a flock of little kids under the guidance of two teachers. If Carson/Emoungu had related these images to the text describing the project's programmatic elements which include job-training facilities, community theater and film house, YMCA, single room occupancy hotel, and a museum dedicated to Frederick Douglass - all listed on p 8 of *Boulevard/Manhattan* - they could have projected a community that represents a spectrum of Harlem residents engaged in different activities and interests.

It is possible, as Carson/Emoungu demonstrate, to fabricate an argument through distortion and omission, but to what purpose? Rather than warn its readers about the "resurrection of modernist rhetoric," *Thresholds* should warn about the occasional speciousness of its own pages.

Roy Stockland

PS Re Carson/Emoungu's reply to Eric Mumford's letter in *Thresholds* 7: your writers just don't get it. They continue to dissemble - and to be exposed easily. The "clean streets of Stockland's renderings" which they conflate with the "fittainment of the people of color that live in [Harlem] presently" are, as I indicate above, full of people of color. As for the "pejorative" representation of neighborhood residents, that is a conjoining of Carson/Emoungu and can be found neither in Harlem photographer Tony Batten's images of people going about their daily lives nor in my text that outlines a method of retaining these very same people as part of the project.

## The authors respond:

It should be clarified at the start that our critique is directed towards the representation of peoples and places in Stockland's two catalogues, *Boulevard/Manhattan* *Minimeses* 6, and *School and Boulevard*.

While indicting us for having failed to recognize the people of color depicted in his projects' renderings, Stockland again fails to acknowledge the rhetorical differences between the images (more specifically the difference between photographs and drawings) he uses to illustrate his catalogue. As is obvious, Stockland has drawn iconographic markers to fictively represent the residents of the proposed community in his architectural renderings. In contradistinction to his utopian schema, Stockland uses photographs to factually represent the contemporary populace (though they are not housed - they are "scattered" on the street), presumably to dramatize the "reality" of existing "residualness." This documentary instance of Harlem's contemporary populace occurs in context of the "residium" (we cite the photo essay on page five of the *Boulevard/Manhattan* catalogue) of present-day Harlem. We ask again, why aren't Harlem's actual, contemporary residents pictured, or photographically contextualized, within Stockland's proposed solution to Harlem's urban blight? Certainly, since this is a community project, where are these people? Why are they only drawn? Which is to say, Stockland fails to see the difference between picturing (photographically) residents of Harlem (which he doesn't) and depicting a "residual" populace of Harlem (which he does).

And why is Stockland so surprised and indignant that we criticize his use of the term "residual"? Perhaps Stockland is unaware of the always already present slippage between such terms as "residual neighborhoods" and its lurking companion "residual people." After all, what does a "neighborhood" consist of if not "people" and "place"? It is further curious that Stockland considers our observation and critique of such terminology, imagery, and their concomitant rhetorical signification a fabrication on our part. Unusual indeed when Stockland himself uncritically states in his *Boulevard/Manhattan* catalogue:

As the nation approaches the year 2000, American cities tend increasingly to become downtowns surrounded by residual neighborhoods. Rendered obsolete by post-World War II socio-economic change, these communities are characterized by substandard housing, property abandonment, an exodus of population, and poverty for those who remain. They are the slums of the late twentieth century. (our emphases).

As concerns Stockland's complaint that we falsely relate his representation of white school children from an era of segregation (a photograph picturing his ideal for the companion Clinton School Project in the Bronx) to his *Boulevard/Manhattan* Project, Stockland fails to recognize the (racially encoded) intertextuality of signification between the (past) utopian imagery used in service of the Clinton School Project, with those images of (present) dystopian Harlem which illustrate his *Boulevard/Manhattan* project - both of which were illustrated in his adjoining catalogue *School and Boulevard*.

"Omission and distortion?" We think not. But perhaps Stockland is right about one thing: we will "never get" the uncritical and arguably insensitive representation of marginalized peoples and places in the service of architectural promotional publications.

Juli Carson  
C. Lindwe Emoungu



# NOTES:

THE ONOMATOPOEIA OF THE DAY :

"...a deluge of textual spittle."